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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001900

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2024

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH AEGEAN ACTIVITY RETURNING TO 2003 LEVELS

REF: A. STATE 56622

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1103

[1](#)C. 04 ANKARA 6443

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman. Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: 2004 had specific events (Cyprus negotiations, Olympics, EU Summit) which prompted Ankara to hold down its flight activity in the Aegean down, but it is now apparently ramping its activity back up to 2003 levels. While the Turks see this as returning to normal, the military is irritated by the incessant Greek complaints, prompting TGS to post on its web site a counter-complaint of its own. Most of the complaints come from Greek claims and requirements which appear contrary to international norms to the Turks. We have and will continue to counsel moderation and patience, and are heartened by both sides' continuing work on CBMs. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) PolMilCouns inquired about Turkish activity in the Aegean with Turkish General Staff (TGS) J5 Greece/Cyprus Department head RADM Mucahit Sislioglu on March 30. Sislioglu confirmed that in February 2005, the number of Turkish Air Force (TUAF) flights over the Aegean (506) was up significantly over the previous two months (229 in January, 220 in December), but the intent was merely to "return to normal." He defined "normal" as the 2003 level, when Turkey flew roughly 400 sorties/month (a total of 4676 sorties). This was significantly lower than the 2002 level (6623 sorties), he emphasized. In 2004, air activity was unusually low, due to suppression of flights at different times during the year for political reasons: Cyprus negotiations were early in the year, the Athens Olympics were in the summer, and the EU Summit that considered when to begin Turkey's accession negotiations was in December. However, operational requirements necessitated more frequent training and exercises than was possible last year, he said.

[1](#)3. (C) Sislioglu noted that TGS was growing increasingly irritated by the incessant Greek complaints in the media about airspace violations that are really just aircraft entering the Athens FIR (something permitted under ICAO rules). (He allowed that at times a TUAF plane might actually violate Greek airspace, but the irritation was not over complaints about those.) In 2003, Turkey unilaterally reduced the number of its Aegean flights and began registering its daily flight schedule with NATO, "which means Greece also receives it." Greece has not reciprocated with any positive step, he complained -- Greece still launches aircraft to intercept Turkish planes and still tags the Turkish aircraft on their radar as enemies. When he visited Athens in mid-February, Greek officers admitted that the Hellenic Air Force releases statistics to the media, thus feeding the stories. TGS' irritation was sufficient to warrant a review of whether the 2003 practices should continue. PolMilCouns counseled patience.

[1](#)4. (C) On a more positive note, Sislioglu confirmed that the CBMs he had previewed for us last month (ref b -- mainly academy and staff colleges exchanges) were progressing. In addition, the two sides have agreed to a June visit to Greece by Turkish Land Forces Commander GEN Buyukanit, the Greeks would send a ship to participate in the Marmaris Festival in late April, and the Turkish Stars aerobatics team would perform at an international air show in Tanagra AB (near Larisa) September 10. Turkish Stars had canceled a scheduled appearance in Izmir to accommodate the show, Sislioglu observed.

[1](#)5. (C) Despite our counsel, TGS on March 31 posted the following item on its web site, alleging Greek harassment of Turkish planes and violation of Turkish territorial waters:

Begin informal Embassy translation of TGS text:

Harassment of Greek Warplanes and Violation of Karasuyu
Territorial Water by the Greek Coast Guard Boat
(Appeared in the TGS web site on March 31st)

While Turkish warplanes were carrying out their routine flights over international air space, which is open for all state planes in Aegean Sea, for different training purposes on different times on March 25th, they were prevented by the Greek armed warplanes and harassed on ground of violating the

FIR.

On the mentioned date, two Greek F-4 planes which had taken off from Limni Square harassed two Turkish Air Force F-4 planes in international airspace northwest of Chios, endangering their flight safety by approaching within 1000 feet of them at 12:53.

On the same day, two Greek M-2000 planes which had taken off from Skyros Square harassed two Turkish F-16 planes in international airspace west of Chios, endangering their flight safety by approaching within 1000 feet of them at 13:05. The two Greek M-2000 planes, which took off from Skyros Square, have violated Turkish airspace in the Karaburun region between 12:48-12:50. As it is known, international agreements don't stipulate that state planes must file flight plans when they fly in international airspace.

Moreover, a Greek Coast Guard boat violated our territorial waters in Kardak region at 11:00 on March 30, 2005. A patrolling Turkish Coast Guard boat went to the said region and warned the Greek Coast Guard boat to leave the area. Despite all the warnings, the Greek Coast Guard boat did not leave the area and continued standing still.

After the mentioned Greek Coast Guard boat finally left the area towards Kelemez Island at 13:15, the Turkish Coast Guard boat left the area.

The Turkish Coast Guard boat has acted cautiously not to cause a crisis and controlled the area without intervening until the Greek boat left the area.

End text.

16. (C) Comment: Disputes between Turkey and Greece over Aegean airspace violations are nothing new. We raise the issue frequently with the GOT. But Greece and Turkey have different views of air space management -- Athens wants flight plans for aircraft in its FIR although ICAO rules exempt national aircraft from the requirement; the Greeks claim 10 rather than 6 NM of territorial air space although no one recognizes that claim. Therefore, complaints will likely continue. And, the Turks are indeed ramping up their activity after suppressing it for a specific reason -- in this case, the EU Summit where Turkey's eventual membership was hanging in the balance. That said, even Greek Embassy officials in Ankara characterize their periodic formal protests to MFA as "routine." Despite the exchange of words, we are encouraged that Ankara and Athens nonetheless seem to be taking additional, albeit small, steps to expand their mil-mil contacts. End comment.

EDELMAN